



Department of Human Services, Office of the Attorney General Commended by D.C. Mayor District Agencies Partner, Recoup More than \$600,000 from Welfare Fraud Prosecutions

The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) received accolades from Mayor Anthony A. Williams for their joint efforts in identifying and prosecuting individuals who commit welfare fraud.

During a press conference at the John A. Wilson Building in May, the Mayor announced that the District government's effort to combat welfare fraud resulted in the recovery of more than \$600,000 from welfare fraud prosecutions.

"We do not now, nor will we ever tolerate welfare fraud," said Mayor Williams. "We want to ensure that people who need help and who are eligible for assistance receive that help. I commend the staff at the Department of Human Services and the Office of the Attorney General for working diligently to make sure that our city's resources are spent helping those who truly need assistance," he said.

Kate Jesberg, Interim Director of the Department of Human Services since March, said that she was pleased that the collaboration between DHS and the OAG has been such a success. To date, \$640,000 has been recouped from welfare fraud prosecutions. By addressing welfare fraud, more dollars are available for eligible District residents who need assistance, Jesberg said.

Since October 2005, DHS and the OAG have been working in tandem to pinpoint individuals who are defrauding the District by illegally receiving public assistance that includes Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, food stamps and Medicaid.



Mayor Anthony A. Williams, center, flanked by Deputy Attorney General David Rubenstein, left, and DHS Interim Director Kate Jesberg, right, during a recent press conference on welfare fraud.

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"The overwhelming majority of welfare recipients in the District are truly needy and eligible for assistance," Jesberg said. "We're working to ensure our scarce resources are available for those who are playing by the rules and are not used by the few who deliberately commit fraud by lying about their income and residence," she said.

Jesberg, the Administrator of DHS' Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) from 1999 until she became Interim Director in March 2006, said she takes welfare fraud very seriously. IMA determines District residents' eligibility for public assistance and helps TANF and food stamp recipients enter employment programs. Currently, 15,562 families in the District are receiving welfare down from approximately 25,000 at its peak.

When DHS and OAG initially teamed up, Jesberg said that the intention was never to accuse individuals who might have made a mistake of fraud. "The people who have been prosecuted are criminals. They are not the typical welfare recipient," she said.

OAG has resolved more than 400 cases, many of which were the result of the ability of DHS to access a federal database of new hires. The database allows DHS personnel to crosscheck the names and home addresses of clients receiving assistance from DHS against the names and home addresses of newly hired local, federal and private industry employees.

"I commend the staff at the Department of Human Services and the Office of the Attorney General for working diligently to make sure that our city's resources are spent helping those who truly need assistance,"

Anthony A. Williams
Mayor
District of Columbia



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“My office is aggressively pursuing those individuals who are defrauding the system by receiving welfare benefits when they are not residents of the District of Columbia or are intentionally failing to report salaries that clearly make them ineligible for assistance,” said Attorney General Robert Spagnoletti. Deputy Attorney General David Rubenstein joined Jesberg at the Mayor’s press conference. Rubenstein’s office prosecutes welfare fraud cases. He also commended the work of Jesberg and DHS.

“We need to get aggressive on fraud. Because of Kate [Jesberg], we have resolved cases and we are moving onto other cases. We’re looking to deter future fraud against the District,” Rubenstein said. The District, Rubenstein said, has 200 cases open.

If an individual commits fraud, they are facing jail time, Rubenstein stressed during the press conference.



In addition to the prosecution efforts of the OAG, IMA has launched a welfare fraud information campaign to inform District residents about the consequences of committing fraud. IMA plans to distribute brochures on welfare fraud to residents who currently receive public assistance and to those who plan to apply for public assistance.

“We [DHS and the OAG] would like to put welfare fraud out of business. When people apply [for assistance], we want them to tell the truth,” Jesberg said.

15 MINUTES...

With Brenda Donald Walker, Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth, Families & Elders

Brenda Donald Walker provides Outreach readers with a glimpse into her responsibilities, priorities and hopes for the coming years.

Q: What are your immediate goals?

A: The most important goal is to get the agencies under the human services] cluster to work together in a collaborative manner. We serve many of the same families, and we want to serve those families more effectively.

Q: As Deputy Mayor you are responsible for oversight and operations, but are there any special projects with which you are currently involved?

A: I have several citywide initiatives that the Mayor has asked me to lead. First, the human capital component of the New Communities initiative is very exciting. The focus here is on linking community development with human capital services in the Northwest One area, the Barry Farms area, and Lincoln Heights – these are the three new communities.

Then, there’s the citywide youth development strategy that focuses on supporting young people and helping them to grow and have happy and productive lives, while also reducing violence. So, it’s a continuum of support and services to children and youth.

Next, there’s the Offender Re-entry initiative, which is helping people who have been in the criminal justice system to reintegrate into the community with their families. Finally, a huge [initiative] that affects DHS is “Homeless No More,” which helps to reduce the number of people who are homeless and provides the kinds of supports and services to people so they will not become homeless.

Q: Of all the responsibilities that you have in terms of oversight, is there any particular area in which you are most interested?

A: They all fit together, which is great. Someone asked me recently if I was good at doing puzzles when I was a child, because they liked they way I looked at the overall picture and figured out how to put the pieces together. That is what’s exciting about this job -- all of the important

elements that support families in our most disadvantaged communities are under the human services cluster. I really see each one as a part of the other. So, I wouldn’t say that one in particular interests me because they all are connected.

Q: What would you like to see happen within DHS?

A: I see DHS as a solid department with a lot of committed employees, some of whom have been there a long time, others who are fairly new and who are focused on essential services to families in the city. And, there are some very important areas [within DHS]. The Early Care and Education Administration (ECEA) is one, and it’s one that has received a lot of attention and deservedly so.

The Family Services Administration (FSA), with its main focus on homeless services, is certainly very important, and I’m happy to see the interim director taking a personal interest in that area. And, of course, the Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) is a well-regarded part of DHS, and one that is still very important to vulnerable families. So, again, all of these pieces are connected. I am totally supportive of DHS, and I want to do whatever I can to help the team be successful.

Q: With eight months remaining in the Williams Administration, what do you hope to accomplish within that time frame?

A: What is most important is to plant the seeds for these citywide initiatives. So, no matter who is mayor next year, the individual will recognize how important these initiatives are and that they must be continued.



DHS Interim Director Kate Jesberg Testifies Before Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for the District of Columbia

DHS Programs Support Family Formation, Marriage; Jesberg Welcomes Collaborative Efforts

Kate Jesberg, Interim Director of the Department of Human Services, testified before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee for the District of Columbia about programs that DHS has developed to support family formation as a way of improving the well being of children and reducing poverty.

Jesberg and Wade F. Horn, Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary for Children and Families and other witnesses appeared before Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KS), chair of the subcommittee in May. Sen. Brownback convened the hearing to examine federal and local policies that create financial disincentives to marriage.

“As you are well aware, the District faces among the highest poverty and child poverty rates in the nation, as well as one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. The District government is committed to improving the lives of residents and addressing the challenges brought about by poverty and single-parenting,” Jesberg said.

She said that through TANF-funded grants, the Department of Human Services (DHS) supported its first marriage-focused program in 2002 through Abundantly Living Services. The grants, according to Jesberg, often provide a starting place for small, community-based organizations attempting to leverage other funds.

She added that this year [2006], the Wedded Bliss Foundation received a DHS grant that allowed them to provide a weekend retreat for couples and also to train staff of other community organizations.

In the future, Jesberg said DHS plans to share information and resources with the East Capital Center for Change, a youth and family development agency in Southeast that serves low-income neighborhoods in the District, and the Capital Area Asset Building Corporation, a non-profit organization that helps create opportunities for individuals to improve their financial management skills, increase savings and build wealth.

“We are very appreciative of your leadership and support of family formation in the District. The Department of Human Services looks forward to collaborating with the East Capital Center for Change and the Capital Area Asset Building Corporation, as we all work to strengthen families and reduce poverty in the District,” Jesberg said.

DHS’ efforts to encourage and support family formation are primarily supported by the TANF and early childhood assistance programs.

“The District’s TANF program has been recognized 13 times for its performance in achieving goals of welfare reform under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996,” Jesberg said.

“This recognition was in the form of high performance and out-of-wedlock birth reduction bonuses totaling more than \$168 million since the inception of this bonus structure. With these additional resources, the District was able to fully embrace its commitments to the third and fourth legislative purposes of TANF – reducing out-of-wedlock births and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families,” she said.

In addition to the grants, Jesberg informed the subcommittee about two TANF-funded initiatives that are most directly related to encouraging family formation: the Family-to-Family program and the D.C. Fatherhood Initiative.



View of U.S. Capitol

“DHS funded the Family-to-Family mentoring program. This program offers a family centered approach to mentoring with the goals of encouraging and promoting the development of individuals within strong families, and within a framework that builds upon family strength, including marriage,” Jesberg said.

“The Family-to-Family program is widely supported by our faith-based partners. Family-to-Family is a grant opportunity that touches upon all four TANF program goals. At the same time, messages of the faith community may be communicated to both the mentee family and the mentor family in fulfilling the mentoring objectives,” she said.

Jesberg also provided an overview of the D.C. Fatherhood Initiative to the subcommittee. She emphasized that the support of non-custodial fathers is critical not only to their ability to support their children, but also in efforts to unite families and encourage marriage.

“The D.C. Fatherhood Initiative builds on best practice models employed nationwide, the resources of government partners, and the service commitment of community-based organizations to provide an array of services, including educational assistance, job placement assistance, and the life skills necessary to promote family re-unification,” Jesberg said.

She explained that of the seven grantees providing direct services, the Hope Foundation and Reintegrating Alternatives Personal Program, provide specialized services to assist ex-offenders as they reintegrate with the community and their families. Funded

Services Fair Connects Homeless Youth to Jobs, Child Care and More

Riaz was 18 when he decided he could no longer live in his parent's house. He felt his family was dysfunctional and that his parent's constant arguing made home life unbearable. Riaz didn't have enough money to make it on his own so he stayed with a friend and then at a hypothermia shelter in Silver Spring before finally winding up on the streets in 2004. He had also dropped out of school.

"Anytime you try to do something different they try to make you an outcast," said Riaz of his experience in high school before finally dropping out in his senior year. "It's hard fitting in, even with adults sometimes."

Riaz, who's been living at the New York Avenue Shelter in Northeast since April 2005, was one of more than 100 young people, age 16-to-24, who attended a service fair at Emery Recreation Center, NW, designed to link homeless youths to employment, health care, child care, and other critical services.

Throughout the day, youth filled every corner of the center's huge multi-purpose room talking to representatives from the DC Departments of Human Services (DHS), Health, Mental Health, Employment Services, and also from DC Public Schools, the University of the District of Columbia, Unity Health Care and others, for information on where to go for drug and mental health counseling, financial advice, mentoring programs, and more.

Although Riaz has been able to earn money—which he saves for college—working as a day laborer, he came to the fair hoping to find a job working with computers. While at the fair, he also filled out an application to receive health insurance and signed up for the District government's summer employment program.

"They told me to go to the N Street location to get placed in a summer job so, I'm going tomorrow," said Riaz, who received his GED last year and wants to study Liberal Arts at the University of the District of Columbia. "You can't get a good job without a degree," he said.

DHS Interim Director Kate Jesberg, who attended the service fair said she was pleased by the turnout.

"This was the first collective effort designed to help our homeless youth," Jesberg said.

"I was impressed not only because of the numbers of young people being served, but also with the attitude of the youth present. Most of those who pre-registered asking for employment assistance came with resumes in hand and an apparent determination to succeed. It's always great to see young people being enthusiastic about their future," she said.

Like Riaz, Lori Fisher also came to the fair looking for a job. To see Fisher laughing and talking with her precocious 10-year old twins, you'd never guess she has been a single mother since age 14. At age 24, Fisher came to the service fair seeking information and resources that would not only help her find employment but to also be of service to others.

"I want to get involved with youth outreach," says Fisher, who lost her job the day before the fair. "I want to share my experience, get involved, and give back."

One of the ways Fisher wants to give back is by opening up a daycare facility. She spent time talking with DHS representatives about the DHS Early Care and Education Administration's programs to help District residents become licensed daycare operators.

Through the DHS Office of Communications and Public Affairs, Fisher was directed to resources to help her through the process of becoming a daycare operator. She was also referred to a free orientation hosted by DOH for prospective daycare operators.

Fisher admits raising twins when she was barely a child herself was hard but says her daughters—Monique and Monee—still amaze her.

The fair also provided Fisher an opportunity to network with representatives of the Sasha Bruce Youthworks, Covenant House, and the Latin American Youth Center. The three organizations provide shelter for most of the youth who attended the fair. Fisher says she hopes to establish a youth roundtable that would provide a vehicle for teenage females who live at the shelters and other at-risk girls to talk.

"I've always wanted to be able to speak to young ladies to try and help prevent some of the things I went through and to let them know that they can make it," says Fisher, who grew up in an unstable living environment before becoming homeless at age 18. Fisher says once she obtains her daycare license she plans to come back and share information with others.



Right to left, Lori Fisher and twin daughters Monique & Monee at service fair in Northwest.

DHS Income Maintenance Administration Handles Alliance Enrollment, Determines District Residents' Eligibility for Free Health Care

The Department of Human Services (DHS), Income Maintenance Administration (IMA) will determine District residents' eligibility for Alliance Health Care insurance beginning June 1, 2006.

Low-income District residents who are not eligible for Medicaid may be eligible to get free health care and prescription drugs



through the Alliance Health Care plan. The Alliance Health care insurance program offers a full range of health care services for eligible residents that include both inpatient hospital care and outpatient medical care, including preventive care. Additionally, emergency services, prescription drugs and dental services are covered.

"We encourage District residents without health insurance to find out if they are eligible for the Alliance Health Care plan," said Kate Jesberg, Interim Director of the Department of Human Services. "DHS' Income Maintenance Administration has streamlined its health insurance application process," she said.

Under the Alliance program, eligible residents have a choice of two managed health care option: Chartered Health Care Plan or Health Right, Inc. To continue participation in the Alliance Health Care plan, current and new members must re-certify each year with IMA. To ensure that coverage does not lapse, members can visit an IMA service center, mail the recertification notice to IMA, or call (202) 727-5355.

Five years ago, the District of Columbia launched the DC Healthcare Alliance, a health care program managed by the Department of Health (DOH), for uninsured residents. Since its inception, thousands of previously uninsured residents have enrolled in the program.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program Boosted Career and Spirit for One Enrollee

Toni Cole felt she would not receive a competitive salary without higher education. She heard about the Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, which provides services to help eligible individuals with disabilities prepare for and maintain employment. Through the program, Cole saw her chance to finish school and get the education she needed to advance her career.

"Once I was able to get stabilized with my disability, I was able to focus on my education," said Cole. "The opportunity for me to return to school was one of the main benefits of enrolling in the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program. Since I was a counselor working with people with substance abuse, it seemed logical for me to get a degree in social work."

RSA's Vocational Rehabilitation Services program provided Cole with support that included the financial aid she needed to attend college and accept job internships. Also, RSA helped Cole transition into the workplace by providing vouchers for dental work, glasses and clothing for job interviews.

With support from the program, Cole completed her undergraduate Social Work degree at the University of the District of Columbia, graduating cum laude with a 3.8 GPA, and went on to graduate from Howard's graduate program in three semesters, instead of the usual four.

"RSA provided me with a variety of supports for me to make the transition," said Cole, now a licensed graduate social worker who does outreach work to help veterans cope at the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.



Toni Cole outside of the Department of Veterans Affairs

The experience of going back to school and getting a Master's degree has definitely boosted Cole's career, she said, noting that she's received several promotions in less than two years on the job.

"Certain agencies won't honor your experience only; you have to have credentials," Cole said. "My formal experience, coupled with my licensing, made me a better practitioner."

Returning to school was also a boost to Cole's spirit as well, she added.

"College strengthened my self esteem so much," said Cole. "I always knew education and exposure were good, but, for a long time, I couldn't get there because of my disability."

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at approximately \$1.3 million in FY06, these community organizations have served more than 2,300 fathers since they began providing services in FY04.

"The Department of Human Services is proud of our efforts to support family formation and marriage, and looks forward to partnering with other efforts in the community, including those of the East Capital Center for Change," Jesberg said.

She said that the Department's program infrastructure provides a sound platform to facilitate usage of Marriage Development Accounts (MDAs), a new savings program to help married and engaged couples increase their savings and build wealth. Eligible couples can earn \$3 in matching funds for every \$1 they save toward the purchase of their first home, college or vocational training or the start-up of a small business.

Jesberg said the combination of the community and faith-based programs and financial support provided through MDAs offer a comprehensive approach to supporting healthy relationships, fostering supportive families, and developing strong communities that can overcome the challenges of poverty and ensure the well being of children.

In conclusion, Jesberg said that the District has taken great strides to mitigate the marriage penalty through the income tax structure. By offering more filing status alternatives than the federal system, District residents can choose a status that minimizes any marriage penalty.

"While this structure does not eliminate all penalties in the city's tax system, it does reduce the disincentive to marriage inherent in the tax structure," she said.



Kate Jesberg, DHS Interim Director

DHS Serves as Safety Net for Students, Young Parents Determined to Succeed

Six years ago, an unexpected pregnancy threatened the future success of Margo Mejia, a junior at Cardozo High School in Northwest from graduating with her classmates because of a stream of unexcused absences from school. The young mother was prepared to forfeit her education to stay at home and care for her infant.

Mejia, 21, says after the birth of her daughter, Jasmin in March 2001, she experienced one catastrophe after another with her child care needs until she was referred to the Department of Human Services (DHS) Early Care and Education Administration (ECEA), formerly the Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD).

ECEA helps eligible District parents pay for the cost of child care through its subsidized child care programs located throughout the city. Parents with children who are six weeks to 12-years-old and who are enrolled in area high schools, colleges and vocational training programs can benefit from ECEA programs.



Margo Mejia in front of Martha's Table in Northwest.

"The Early Care and Education Administration does an amazing job. ... The voucher certainly helped me because at the time, I didn't have an income. And, it was not easy being a single parent with other responsibilities. The [money] that I used to spend in child care, I can now use to pay my bills. It's been a tremendous help," Mejia says.

For the first eight months after the birth of her daughter, Mejia says she encountered myriad problems associated with child care. A family member doled out hundreds of dollars a month to ensure she could attend school. Eventually, Mejia learned about Martha's Table, Inc., in Northwest. That's where she found out about subsidized child care services provided by the Early Care and Education Administration.

A heart-to-heart with Simeon Johnson, the director of the daycare center at Martha's Table, Inc., allayed Mejia's concerns about attending classes and lifted her spirits too, she says.

"I told her that I was in school, but I was having a lot of issues. So, [Ms. Johnson] referred me to OECD. She told me to go there and get a voucher since I had no income and was still in school," Mejia says.

After a meeting with ECEA personnel, Mejia, who lives in Northwest, was able to take her daughter to Martha's Table with a voucher in-hand for free child care while she attended school. Martha's Table, a non-profit organization has provided food, learning, healthy living, recreation and family support services to the District since 1980. The organization operates Before Care and After Care programs for children.

Today, Mejia works as assistant director for children's programs at Martha's Table. Her little girl, now 4 ½, still participates in

Korean Delegates Take Notes on DC's Shelter Services

The Family Services Administration (FSA) and the District's shelter facilities were a key tourist attraction for 14 Korean delegates from the Gyeonggi-do government who visited the U.S. on May 1, 2006. "Gyeonggi", the most populous province in South Korea, has the largest local government in Korea surrounding the Seoul metropolitan area.

The delegates, led by Eun-Hee Kang, general director of Gyeonggi's Family and Women's Policy Office, consisted of Gyeonggi government officers and the directors of women service centers from that area. The Korean Government planned trips to Washington, DC and also New York City to learn about effective human services programs that could help improve its family services programs.

Last year, the Gyeonggi government sent a delegation to the U.S. to learn the protection system for sexually assaulted women. That trip helped the government create advanced policies on women and community services, officials said.

"Nowadays Korea's federal and local governments' main issue is developing family and women services," said Joo-hyoung Kim, a cooperator of Family and Women's Policy Office, in her email correspondence to set up the DC tour. "We believe that the District of Columbia's human services is one of the best in U.S.A."



Left to right, Joo-hyoung Kim, Ricardo Lyles, Tunde Eboda and Hwan-Joon Choi, a translator for the Korean Delegation.

When the delegates arrived, FSA Administrator Ricardo Lyles and FSA Program Managers Tunde Eboda and Barbara Strothers provided an overview of the administration's programs. They then led the delegation on a tour of the New York Avenue homeless shelter in Northeast.

The delegates, who had expressed an interest in viewing DC shelters, were amazed by the number of on-site services provided to those living at the New York Avenue facility. They were also shocked to learn that District law prohibits the

homeless from being turned away or thrown out of shelter facilities. At one point, one of the delegates asked, "Why do you have to be so advanced?"

Promotional items used to get the word out about FSA programs were also of great interest. These included literature and unique souvenir items such as lipstick cases that conceal information about shelter facilities to help battered women flee abusive situations discretely.

"The literature [and other promotional items] is very innovative," said Hwan Joan Choi, who was among the 13 delegates. "We got a lot of good information today."

It comes as no surprise to FSA that the District's homeless shelter programs would be viewed as an international model.

"In some areas both [the District and New York] have been designated as 'best practices' in terms of shelter programs," Lyles said, adding that like the District, New York also has a shelter-on-demand policy.

Still, the international interest in the District and the favorable impression that the delegation took away were validation that many of the city's homeless initiatives are on the right track, noted Lyles.

"We had a debriefing on the hypothermia program recently and what came out of it was that the District and Philadelphia are model programs in terms of providing services when the temperature is 32 or lower," Lyles said. "The collaboration we have with the fire dept, police EMA and shelter programs during this time period brings vital partners into the process and truly is unique."



Korean delegates take notes on District shelters.

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programs at the center. And, Mejia says proudly that she has received a scholarship to attend the University of the District of Columbia. She plans to major in Education.

"Working at Martha's Table and having my daughter here [with me] – I have no words to express my feelings. For me, to have my child here is a blessing. ...I see a lot of parents at Martha's Table with vouchers. When parents [initially] come to Martha's Table to

enroll their children [in child care programs] they're told about the sliding scale fee," Mejia says.

"For parents who cannot afford to pay, they're told about the voucher system and that helps them," she says.

2-1-1 Answers, Please Team Provides a Lifeline for District Residents

DHS Call Center Extends Courtesy and Displays Competence During Crises

Bernetha Scipio remembers the morning that a senior citizen gasping for breath called 2-1-1 Answers, Please for help. The 75-year-old woman had walked to her local pharmacy to get her prescription, only to find that she could not afford her medication. The \$9 cost of the prescription had skyrocketed.

Scipio, a 2-1-1 Answers, Please customer resource advisor (CRA) since 1996, said she immediately contacted the pharmacy. During a three-way conversation among the caller, the pharmacy and Scipio, she soon realized the need to contact the caller's insurance company for further information.

"The insurance company pulled up [the caller's] records and realized that a mistake had been made. The insurance company was charging her [the caller] \$80.00 more than she would normally pay for her medicine," Scipio said.

Once the insurance company had corrected its records, Scipio then contacted the pharmacy to ensure that the error would be corrected. In the end, Scipio said the caller's medication would cost her \$9 and not a penny more.

Before the conversation ended, the caller told the veteran CRA that "the Lord must have sent you." The kind remarks made Scipio's day.

Helping people cut through red tape and get the help they need is all in a day's work for Scipio and the seven customer resource advisors who man the 2-1-1 Answers, Please hotline, a 24-hour social service information and referral program for District residents. "When a caller is stressed-out or in trouble, we're the friendly voices that they hear. Oftentimes, a friendly voice can make all the difference in the world," Scipio said.

Debra Minor of 2-1-1 answered a call from a mother of five, recently. The caller said that she and her husband and children had been evicted. The caller said that she refused to continue to pay rent for a roach-infested two-bedroom apartment in the District. The conditions were unhealthy for her children. Rather, than pay for squalid accommodations, the caller took her family to a hotel until the money ran out. Now homeless, the family needed shelter.

Minor listened intently. She provided the mother with the number to the Virginia Williams Resource Center in Southwest, the District's emergency shelter for families. Then, she promptly connected the caller to the center.

"We try and calm people down. We want them to understand that, yes, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. At the end of our conversations, [callers] are much calmer and appreciative of our assistance," Minor said.

For Minor, the work equates to a labor of love. The information that 2-1-1 provides to District residents is invaluable to callers in need of assistance or guidance.

"I really enjoy what I do. It's human nature to listen and do what you can to help people," she said.

In FY 2005, the team of 211 Answers, Please, handled social service information calls from 47,466 District residents, and referred 24,230 residents to government and private sector programs.



Debra Minor responds to a caller at the 2-1-1 Answers, Please call center.

With a background in law enforcement, there's not much that can rattle Zina Anderson, a CRA with 2-1-1 since 2001. Like her colleagues, she helps residents with a host of situations from convincing Verizon to reconnect an 83-year-old resident's telephone service to helping a young woman with a disability and a baby find housing.

"I love this work. If I were to hit the Lotto, I would set-up something

for senior citizens and teenagers, because I don't think there are enough resources for them. For seniors to have worked all of their lives, and not be comfortable and not have peace of mind is a shame," Anderson said. "And for teens in the world today, they have it so hard. There's so much peer pressure," she said.

In May, Anderson assisted a 23-year-old homeless mother with a baby. The caller had been put out of her home by a parent. Anderson said she quickly contacted the Sasha Bruce Youthworks, Inc., and Covenant House Washington in Southeast, two facilities that provide shelter and support services for homeless, runaway and at-risk youth. Unfortunately, the caller was too old to qualify for either program. Anderson said she then called the Virginia Williams Resource Center, but there was a waiting list. Determined to help the caller who suffered from a learning disability, Anderson called Catholic Charities and made inquiries about programs for homeless women with children.

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Finally, Anderson talked with a contact at the Tenants Empowerment Network, a program operated by Catholic Charities. Anderson conveyed the information to the caller and asked the young woman to follow her instructions. In the meantime, the CRA talked with a friend of the caller, and secured housing for the mother and child for two-weeks.

"We are going to try and expedite her admittance into the Catholic Charities program. I hope to get priority treatment because she is disabled with an infant," Anderson said.

2-1-1 Answers, Please Database Specialist Ensures Callers Receive Accurate, Up-to-Date Information

Rebecca Bush of *2-1-1 Answers, Please* provides an invaluable service. As the lone database specialist for the 24-hour call center, she's charged with the Herculean task of ensuring that the information that community resource advisors relay to callers is comprehensive and up-to-date.

The job entails researching new social service programs and contacting government and non-profit agencies for inclusion in the *2-1-1 Answers, Please* database. Bush scours community newspapers, reviews District of Columbia websites, and reads flyers posted on bulletin boards throughout the 64 New York Ave., N.E. building to stay current. She also gets a helping hand from her *2-1-1* colleagues who tell her about new programs.

"Sometimes, we're contacted directly by agencies who have seen our website, and other times, callers will notify us about new programs," Bush said.

"[Currently], we have about 1,700 programs in our database. My job is to ensure that the information is accurate and detailed so that [when] we refer our callers to agencies, they know the intake procedures, including the hours [of operation], the location, any documentation that they should bring, and the eligibility requirements," Bush said.

Bush said another aspect of her job includes maintaining the DHS website for *Answers Please*. Updates and new information that Bush has obtained throughout the day are uploaded on the www.answersplease.dc.gov website each night.

"I'm very excited about the website because it helps me to better serve those in need of social services. It's an alternative way of accessing services. The website complements the 24-hour call service. And, it's not only used by people who need services, it is used by service providers also," she said.

For instance, a social worker in search of employment training for a client can refer directly to the website for a comprehensive listing of training programs in the District, Bush said.

The www.answersplease.dc.gov website provides an array of categories that include employment training, transportation, child care, and many more to aid social workers in locating services for their clients.

Bush encourages current service providers to take advantage of the *Answers, Please* website and update their program information on-line using the "Update Existing Program" link. New service providers can also use the website to fill out applications that will be instantly forwarded to her in-box and included in the database. Of course, the public is welcome to make recommendations about new programs.

"I always call to check information whenever I receive an application. And, we check with [current] service providers to ensure that their services are still available," Bush said.

Her job as the sole database specialist may be somewhat solitary, but it's one that she has come to love for a variety of reasons.

"I was always interested in social services, but I'm also somewhat of a computer nerd. So, [my position] blends both of my interests," she said with a smile.



Rebecca Bush, Database Specialist for 2-1-1 Answers, Please.